# My Key of Life

By Helen Keller

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# MY KEY OF LIFE

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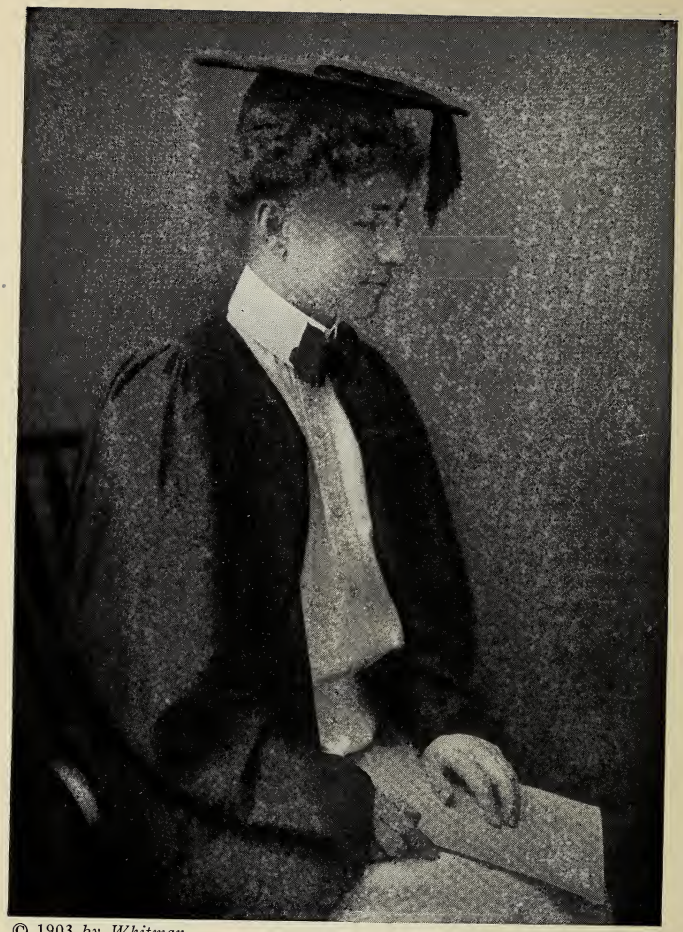

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Helen Keller

# MY KEY *of* LIFE

(OPTIMISM)

BY

HELEN KELLER

AUTHOR OF

"THE STORY OF MY LIFE"

*"The Girl Who Found the Bluebird."*

—MAETERLINCK.

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TO MY TEACHER

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# PREFACE

IT was a wise writer, one Ecclesiastes, who said, "The thing which has been is the thing which shall be: for verily, there is nothing new under the sun." Hence I salute the reappearance of this first child of my brain. I have just read "Optimism" with meticulous fingers sniffing faults (it has been embossed for the blind) hoping to forestall criticism by correcting some of the more glaring defects. But I soon convinced myself that the defects give the essay whatever individuality it has. Any attempt to reconcile the point of view of the girl with the thoughts and ideals of the woman would be disastrous. Youth has its own way of thinking and feeling, and perhaps it is wiser than age.

Its brave beliefs are grounded in faith beyond experience.

I wrote "Optimism" when I was a student at Radcliffe College. I had lived through a marvellous experience. My heart was filled to the brim with love and gladness. I thought of the world as the visible manifestation of God's goodness.

Deaf, dumb and blind from my nineteenth month, I had wandered helplessly in a desolate "No-man's-land" until I was seven. Then SHE came and took my hand and led me by untrodden paths through the silent dark back to the living ways of men. This was an adventure full of enchantment. From darkness to light, from silence to language and harmony, from dumbness to speech—O wondrous the change! I loved everything my fingers touched. The world seemed to me to overflow with goodness, justice and love.

I learned about life only from those who loved me—from people who were tender with me, who praised and encouraged me when the way was hard. The rich treasures of literature, philosophy and religion were poured into my eager hands. I had many good friends, beautiful surroundings, interesting studies, and for my constant companion and guide I had one of the greatest teachers who have blessed mankind. Was it any wonder that I was an ardent optimist at twenty? "Optimism" was written in the glow of young enthusiasm. The knowledge which comes with years and suffering had not dimmed the blue and gold of my dream-world.

Like other fortunately circumstanced young people I sat at the feet of authority, absorbing opinions, ideas and points of view of comfortable persons who live in the world, but are not of it. I knew that many of my fellow-

creatures had to work for a living. But it was years before I realized that millions of men must labor all their lives for food and shelter, and bear the heaviest burdens of existence and die, never having known the joy of living. This knowledge was a cruel blow to my optimism. The world was not so amazingly satisfactory after all. The lovely purple bloom that was on everything had gone forever.

But optimism is a state of mind, and only slightly affected by actuality. The born optimist is not easily dismayed. If he finds himself shelterless, he takes refuge in a wonder-house not built with hands.

As I look out upon the world today, I am not disheartened. My brightest hopes are unfulfilled, but the ways of God are long, long ways. The calamity of the Great War lies enormous across the world. But may not even that be God's bridge-way to the Prom-

ised Land? When I think of the suffering, the disease, the famine, the slaughter, all the helpless blundering and slavish acquiescence, all the travail, all the sordid aspirations of my fellowmen, I am a hundredfold afflicted. But the thought comes to me that, like the little deaf, dumb and blind child I once was, mankind is burgeoning out of the darkness of ignorance and hate into the light of a happier day.

Already the rebirth of the nations has begun. Men are finding out that ignorance is the only darkness, and selfishness is the Great Crime, and that useful work is the highest form of worship. They are beginning to see that life will never be fair and square for all until each one earns his daily bread. They are learning that co-operation in work, trade, art, science—in all life—is the hope of the world. When this lesson is thoroughly learned, "all men will be lovers: and every calamity will be

dissoved in the universal sunshine." We are still stumbling in the dark, but we are facing toward the light.

HELEN KELLER.

# Part I

# OPTIMISM WITHIN

# Part I

## OPTIMISM WITHIN

COULD we choose our environment, and were desire in human undertakings synonymous with endowment, all men would, I suppose, be optimists. Certainly most of us regard happiness as the proper end of all earthly enterprise. The will to be happy animates alike the philosopher, the prince and the chimney-sweep. No matter how dull, or how mean, or how wise a man is, he feels that happiness is his indisputable right.

It is curious to observe what different ideals of happiness people cherish, and in what singular places they look for this well-spring of their life. Many look for it in the hoarding of riches, some in the pride of power, and others in the achievements of art and literature; a few seek it in the exploration

of their own minds, or in the search for knowledge.

Most people measure their happiness in terms of physical pleasure and material possession. Could they win some visible goal which they have set on the horizon, how happy they would be! Lacking this gift or that circumstance, they would be miserable. If happiness is to be so measured, I who cannot hear or see have every reason to sit in a corner with folded hands and weep. If I am happy in spite of my deprivations, if my happiness is so deep that it is a faith, so thoughtful that it becomes a philosophy of life,—if, in short, I am an optimist, my testimony to the creed of optimism is worth hearing. As sinners stand up in meeting and testify to the goodness of God, so one who is called afflicted may rise up in gladness of conviction and testify to the goodness of life.

Once I knew the depth where no

hope was, and darkness lay on the face of all things. Then love came and set my soul free. Once I knew only darkness and stillness. Now I know hope and joy. Once I fretted and beat myself against the wall that shut me in. Now I rejoice in the consciousness that I can think, act and attain heaven. My life was without past or future; death, the pessimist would say, "a consummation devoutly to be wished." But a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness, and my heart leaped to the rapture of living. Night fled before the day of thought, and love and joy and hope came up in a passion of obedience to knowledge. Can any one who has escaped such captivity, who has felt the thrill and glory of freedom be a pessimist?

My early experience was thus a leap from bad to good. If I tried, I could not check the momentum of my first

leap out of the dark; to move breast forward is a habit learned suddenly at that first moment of release and rush into the light. With the first word I used intelligently, I learned to live, to think, to hope. Darkness cannot shut me in again. I have had a glimpse of the shore, and can now live by the hope of reaching it.

So my optimism is no mild and unreasoning satisfaction. A poet once said I must be happy because I did not see the bare, cold present, but lived in a beautiful dream. I do live in a beautiful dream; but that dream is the actual, the present,—not cold, but warm; not bare, but furnished with a thousand blessings. The very evil which the poet supposed would be a cruel disillusionment is necessary to the fullest knowledge of joy. Only by contact with evil could I have learned to feel by contrast the beauty of truth and love and goodness.

It is a mistake always to contemplate the good and ignore the evil, because by making people neglectful it lets in disaster. There is a dangerous optimism of ignorance and indifference. It is not enough to say that the twentieth century is the best age in the history of mankind, and to take refuge from the evils of the world in skyey dreams of good. How many good men, prosperous and contented, looked around and saw naught but good, while millions of their fellowmen were bartered and sold like cattle! No doubt, there were comfortable optimists who thought Wilberforce a meddlesome fanatic when he was working with might and main to free the slaves. I distrust the rash optimism in this country that cries, "Hurrah, we're all right! This is the greatest nation on earth," when there are grievances that call loudly for redress. That is false optimism. Optimism that does not count

the cost is like a house builded on sand. A man must understand evil and be acquainted with sorrow before he can write himself an optimist and expect others to believe that he has reason for the faith that is in him.

I know what evil is. Once or twice I have wrestled with it, and for a time felt its chilly touch on my life; so I speak with knowledge when I say that evil is of no consequence, except as a sort of mental gymnastic. For the very reason that I have come in contact with it, I am more truly an optimist. I can say with conviction that the struggle which evil necessitates is one of the greatest blessings. It makes us strong, patient, helpful men and women. It lets us into the soul of things and teaches us that although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it. My optimism, then, does not rest on the absence of evil, but on a glad belief in the preponderance

of good and a willing effort always to co-operate with the good, that it may prevail. I try to increase the power God has given me to see the best in everything and every one, and make that Best a part of my life. The world is sown with good; but unless I turn my glad thoughts into practical living and till my own field, I cannot reap a kernel of the good.

Thus my optimism is grounded in two worlds, myself and what is about me. I demand that the world be good, and lo, it obeys. I proclaim the world good, and facts range themselves to prove my proclamation overwhelmingly true. To what is good I open the doors of my being, and jealously shut them against what is bad. Such is the force of this beautiful and wilful conviction, it carries itself in the face of all opposition. I am never discouraged by absence of good. I never can be argued into hopelessness. Doubt

and mistrust are the mere panic of timid imagination, which the steadfast heart will conquer, and the large mind transcend.

It was not so long ago that Carlyle flung forth his gospel of work. To the dreamers of the Revolution, who built cloud-castles of happiness, and, when the inevitable winds rent the castles asunder, turned pessimists, he cried aloud his creed of labor. "Be no longer a Chaos, but a World. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it, then. Up, up! whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called To-day; for the Night cometh wherein no man may work."

I, too, can work, and because I love to labor with my head and my hands, I am an optimist in spite of all. I used

to think I should be thwarted in my desire to do something useful. But I have found out that though the ways in which I can make myself useful are few, yet the work open to me is endless. The gladdest laborer in the vineyard may be a cripple. Even should the others outstrip him, yet the vineyard ripens in the sun each year, and the full clusters weigh into his hand. Darwin could work only half an hour at a time; yet in many diligent half-hours he laid anew the foundations of natural science. I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but it is my chief duty and joy to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. It is my service to think how I can best fulfil the demands that each day makes upon me, and to rejoice that others can do what I cannot.

I trust, and nothing that happens disturbs my trust. I recognize the beneficence of the power which we all

worship as supreme—Order, Fate, the Great Spirit, Nature, God. I recognize this power in the sun that makes all things grow and keeps life afoot. I make a friend of this indefinable force, and straightway I feel glad, brave and ready for any lot Heaven may decree for me. This is my religion of optimism.

# Part II

# OPTIMISM WITHOUT

## Part II

## OPTIMISM WITHOUT

OPTIMISM, then, is a fact within my own heart. But as I look out upon life, my heart meets no contradiction. In literature, philosophy, religion and history I find the mighty witnesses to my faith.

Philosophy is the history of a deaf-blind person writ large. From the talks of Socrates up through Plato, Berkeley and Kant, philosophy records the efforts of human intelligence to be free of the clogging material world and fly forth into a universe of pure idea. A deaf-blind person ought to find special meaning in Plato's Ideal World. These things which you see and hear and touch are not the reality of realities, but imperfect manifesta-

tions of the Idea, the Principle, the Spiritual; the Idea is the truth, the rest is delusion.

If this be so, my brethren who enjoy the fullest use of the senses are not aware of any reality which may not equally well be in reach of my mind. Philosophy gives to the mind the prerogative of seeing truth, and bears us into a realm where I, who am blind, am not different from you who see. When I learned from Berkeley that your eyes receive an inverted image of things which your brain unconsciously corrects, I began to suspect that the eye is not a very reliable instrument after all, and I felt as one who had been restored to equality with others, glad, not because the senses avail them so little, but because in God's eternal world, mind and spirit avail so much. It seemed to me that philosophy had been written for my special consolation, whereby I get even with some

modern philosophers who apparently think that I was intended as an experimental case for their special instruction! But in a little measure my small voice of individual experience does join in the declaration of philosophy that the good is the only world, and that world is a world of spirit. It is also a universe where order is All, where an unbroken logic holds the parts together, where disorder defines itself as non-existence, where evil, as St. Augustine held, is delusion, and therefore is not.

All the world's great philosophers have been lovers of God and believers in man's inner goodness. To know the history of philosophy is to know that the highest thinkers of the ages, the seers of the tribes and the nations, have been optimists.

The growth of philosophy is the story of man's spiritual life. Outside lies that great mass of events which we

call History. As I look on this mass, I see it take form and shape itself in the ways of God. The history of man is an epic of progress. In the world within and the world without I see a wonderful correspondence, a glorious symbolism which reveals the human and the divine communing together, the lesson of philosophy repeated in fact. In all the parts that compose the history of mankind hides the spirit of good, and gives meaning to the whole.

Far back in the twilight of history I see the savage fleeing from the forces of nature which he has not learned to control, and seeking to propitiate supernatural beings which are but the creation of his superstitious fear. With a shift of imagination I see the savage emancipated, civilized. He no longer worships the grim deities of ignorance. Through suffering he has learned to build a roof over his head, to defend his life and his home, and over his state

he has erected a temple in which he worships the joyous gods of light and song. From suffering he has learned justice; from the struggle with his fellows he has learned the distinction between right and wrong which makes him a moral being. He is gifted with the genius of Greece.

But Greece was not perfect. Her poetical and religious ideals were far above her practice; therefore she died, that her ideals might survive to ennoble coming ages.

Rome, too, left the world a rich inheritance. Through the vicissitudes of history her laws and ordered government have stood a majestic object-lesson for the ages. But when the stern, frugal character of her people ceased to be the bone and sinew of her civilization, Rome fell.

Then came the new nations of the North and founded a more permanent society. The base of Greek and Roman

society was the slave, crushed into the condition of the wretches who "labored, foredone, in the field and at the workshop, like haltered horses, if blind, so much the quieter." The base of the new society was the freeman who fought, tilled, judged and grew from more to more. He wrought a state out of tribal kinship and fostered an independence and self-reliance which no oppression could destroy. The story of man's slow ascent from savagery through barbarism and self-mastery to civilization is the embodiment of the spirit of optimism. From the first hour of the new nations each century has seen a better Europe, until the development of the world demanded America.

It is true, America has devoted herself largely to the solution of material problems—breaking the fields, opening the mines, irrigating deserts, spanning the continent with railroads; but she is doing these things in a new way, by

educating her people, by placing at the service of every man's need every resource of human skill. She is transmuting her industrial wealth into the education of her workmen, so that unskilled people shall have no place in American life, so that all men shall bring mind and soul to the control of matter. Her children are not drudges and slaves. The Constitution has declared it, and the spirit of our institutions has confirmed it. The best the land can teach them they shall know. They shall learn that there is no upper class in their country, and no lower, and they shall understand how it is that God and His world are for everybody.

America might do all this, and still be selfish, still be a worshipper of Mammon. But America is the home of charity as well as of commerce. In the midst of roaring traffic, side by side with noisy factory and sky-reaching warehouse, one sees the school, the

library, the hospital, the park—works of public benevolence which represent wealth wrought into ideas that shall endure forever. Behold what America has already done to alleviate suffering and restore the afflicted to society—given sight to the fingers of the blind, language to the dumb lip, and mind to the idiot clay, and tell me if indeed she worships Mammon only. Who shall measure the sympathy, skill and intelligence with which she ministers to all who come to her, and lessens the ever-swelling tide of poverty, misery and degradation which every year rolls against her gates from all the nations?

Another sign of awakened and enlightened public conscience is the effort to provide the working-class with better houses. Did it occur to anyone a hundred years ago to think whether the dwellings of the poor were sanitary, convenient or sunny? Do not forget that in the "good old times" cholera

and typhus devastated whole counties, and that pestilence walked abroad in the capitals of Europe.

Not only have our laboring classes better houses and better places to work in; but employers recognize the right of the employed to seek more than the bare wage of existence. In the darkness and turmoil of our modern industrial strifes we discern but dimly the principles that underlie the struggle. The recognition of the right of all men to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, a spirit of conciliation such as Burke dreamed of, the willingness on the part of the strong to make concessions to the weak, the realization that the rights of the employer are bound up in the rights of the employed—in these the optimist beholds the signs of our times.

Another right which the State has recognized as belonging to each man is the right to an education. In the

enlightened parts of Europe and in America, every city, every town, every village, has its school; and it is no longer a class who have access to knowledge, for to the children of the poorest laborer the school-door stands open. From the civilized nations universal education is driving the dull host of illiteracy.

Who can doubt the vastness of the achievements of education when one considers how different the condition of the blind and the deaf is from what it was a century ago? They were then objects of superstitious pity, and shared the lowest beggar's lot. Everybody looked upon their case as hopeless, and this view plunged them deeper in despair. The blind themselves laughed in the face of Haüy when he offered to teach them to read. How pitiable is the cramped sense of imprisonment in circumstances which teaches men to expect no good and to treat any attempt

to relieve them as the vagary of a disordered mind! But now, behold the transformation; see how institutions and industrial establishments for the blind have sprung up as if by magic; see how many of the deaf have learned not only to read and write, but to speak; and remember that the faith and patience of Dr. Howe have borne fruit in the efforts that are being made everywhere to educate the deaf-blind and equip them for the struggle. Do you wonder that I am full of hope and lifted up?

The highest result of education is tolerance. Long ago men fought and died for their faith; but it took ages to teach them the other kind of courage,—the courage to recognize the faiths of their brethren and their rights of conscience. Tolerance is the first principle of community; it is the spirit which conserves the best that all men think. No loss by flood and lightning, no de-

struction of cities and temples by the hostile forces of nature, has deprived man of so many noble lives and impulses as those which his intolerance has destroyed.

With wonder and sorrow I go back in thought to the ages of intolerance and bigotry. I see Jesus received with scorn and nailed on the cross. I see his followers hounded and tortured and burned. I am present where the finer spirits that revolt from the superstition of the Middle Ages are accused of impiety and stricken down. I behold the children of Israel reviled and persecuted unto death by those who pretend Christianity with the tongue; I see them driven from land to land, hunted from refuge to refuge, summoned to the felon's place, exposed to the whip, mocked as they utter amid the pain of martyrdom a confession of the faith which they have kept with such splendid constancy. The same bigotry that

oppresses the Jews falls tiger-like upon Christian noncomformists of purest lives and wipes out the Albigenses and the peaceful Vaudois, "whose bones lie on the mountains cold." I see the clouds part slowly, and I hear a cry of protest against the bigot. The restraining hand of tolerance is laid upon the inquisitor, and the humanist utters a message of peace to the persecuted. Instead of the cry, "Burn the heretic!" men study the human soul with sympathy, and there enters into their hearts a new reverence for that which is unseen.

The idea of brotherhood redawns upon the world with a broader significance than the narrow association of members in a sect or creed; and thinkers of great soul like Lessing challenge the world to say which is more godlike, the hatred and tooth-and-nail grapple of conflicting religions, or sweet accord and mutual helpfulness. Ancient prej-

udice of man against his brotherman wavers and retreats before the radiance of a more generous sentiment, which will not sacrifice men to forms, or rob them of the comfort and strength they find in their own beliefs. The heresy of one age becomes the orthodoxy of the next.

# Part III

# THE PRACTICE OF OPTIMISM

## Part III

# THE PRACTICE OF OPTIMISM

THE test of all beliefs is their practical effect in life. If it be true that optimism compels the world forward, and pessimism retards it, then it is dangerous to propagate a pessimistic philosophy. One who believes that the pain in the world outwĕighs the joy, and expresses that unhappy conviction, only adds to the pain. Schopenhauer is an enemy to the race. Even if he earnestly believed that this is the most wretched of possible worlds, he should not promulgate a doctrine which robs men of the incentive to fight with circumstances. If Life gave him ashes for bread, it was his fault. Life is a fair field, and the right will prosper if we stand by our guns.

Let pessimism once take hold of the mind, and life is all topsy-turvy, all vanity and vexation of spirit. There is no cure for individual or social disorder, except in forgetfulness and annihilation. "Let us eat, drink and be merry," says the pessimist, "for tomorrow we die." If I regarded my life from the point of view of the pessimist, I should be undone. I should seek in vain for the light that does not visit my eyes and the music that does not ring in my ears. I should beg night and day and never be satisfied. I should sit apart in awful solitude, a prey to fear and despair. But since I consider it a duty to myself and to others to be happy, I escape a misery worse than any physical deprivation.

Who shall dare let his incapacity for hope or goodness cast a shadow upon the courage of those who bear their burdens as if they were privileges? The optimist cannot fall back, cannot

falter; for he knows his neighbor will be hindered by his failure to keep in line. He will therefore hold his place fearlessly and remember the duty of silence. Sufficient unto each heart is its own sorrow. He will take the iron claws of circumstance in his hand and use them as tools to break away the obstacles that block his path. He will work as if upon him alone depended the establishment of heaven on earth.

We have seen that the world's philosophers—the Sayers of the Word—were optimists; so also are the men of action and achievement—the Doers of the Word. Dr. Howe found his way to Laura Bridgman's soul because he began with the belief that he could reach it. English jurists had said that the deaf-blind were idiots in the eyes of the law. Behold what the optimist does. He controverts a hard legal axiom; he looks behind the dull impassive clay and sees a human soul in bond-

age, and quietly, resolutely sets about its deliverance. His efforts are victorious. He creates intelligence out of idiocy and proves to the law that the deaf-blind man is a responsible being.

When Dr. Seguin declared his opinion that the feeble-minded could be taught, again people laughed, and in their complacent wisdom said he was no better than an idiot himself. But the noble optimist persevered, and by and by the reluctant pessimists saw that he whom they ridiculed had become one of the world's philanthropists. Thus the optimist believes, attempts, achieves. He stands always in the sunlight. Some day the wonderful, the inexpressible, arrives and shines upon him, and he is there to welcome it. His soul meets his own and beats a glad march to every new discovery, every fresh victory over difficulties, every addition to human knowledge and happiness.

We have found that our great philosophers and our great men of action are optimists. So, too, our most potent men of letters have been optimists in their books and in their lives. No pessimist ever won an audience commensurately wide with his genius, and many optimistic writers have been read and admired out of all measure to their talents, simply because they wrote of the sunlit side of life. Dickens, Lamb, Goldsmith, Irving, all the well-beloved and gentle humorists, were optimists. Swift, the pessimist, has never had as many readers as his towering genius should command, and indeed, when he comes into another century and meets Thackeray, that generous optimist can hardly do him justice. In spite of the latter-day notoriety of the "Rubáiyát" of Omar Khayyám, we may set it down as a rule that he who would be heard must be a believer, must have a fundamental optimism in his philosophy.

He may bluster and disagree and lament as Carlyle and Ruskin do sometimes; but a basic confidence in the good destiny of life and of the world must underlie his work.

If Browning were less difficult to read, he would surely be the dominant poet in this century. I feel the ecstasy with which he exclaims, "Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth this autumn morning!" And how he sets my brain going when he says, because there is imperfection, there must be perfection; completeness must come of incompleteness; failure as an evidence of triumph for the fulness of the days. Yes, discord is, that harmony may be; pain destroys, that health may renew; perhaps I am deaf and blind that others likewise afflicted may see and hear with a more perfect sense! From Browning I learn that there is no lost good, and that makes it easier for me to go at life, right or wrong, do

the best I know, and fear not. My heart responds proudly to his exhortation to pay gladly life's debt of pain, darkness and cold. Lift up your burden, it is God's gift, bear it nobly.

The man of letters whose voice is to prevail must be an optimist, and his voice often learns its message from his life. Stevenson's life became a tradition only ten years after his death; he has taken his place among the heroes, the bravest man of letters since Johnson and Lamb. I remember an hour when I was discouraged and ready to falter. For days I had been pegging away at a task which refused to get itself accomplished. In the midst of my perplexity I read an essay of Stevenson which made me feel as if I had been "outing" in the sunshine, instead of losing heart over a difficult task. I tried again with new courage and succeeded almost before I knew it. I have failed many times since; but I

have never felt so disheartened as I did before that sturdy preacher gave me my lesson in the "fashion of the smiling face."

Every optimist moves along with progress and hastens it, while every pessimist would keep the world at a standstill. The consequence of pessimism in the life of a nation is the same as in the life of the individual. Pessimism kills the instinct that urges men to struggle against poverty, ignorance and crime, and dries up all the fountains of joy in the world. In imagination I leave the country which lifts up the manhood of the poor and I visit India, the underworld of fatalism—where three hundred million human beings, scarcely men, submerged in ignorance and misery, precipitate themselves still deeper into the pit. Why are they thus? Because they have for thousands of years been the victims of their philosophy, which teaches them

that men are as grass, and the grass fadeth, and there is no more greenness upon the earth. They sit in the shadow and let the circumstances they should master grip them, until they cease to be Men, and are made to dance and salaam like puppets in a play. After a little hour death comes and hurries them off to the grave, and other puppets with other "pasteboard passions and desires" take their place, and the show goes on for centuries.

Go to India and see what sort of civilization is developed when a nation lacks faith in progress and bows to the gods of darkness. Under the influence of Brahminism genius and ambition have been suppressed. There is no one to befriend the poor or to protect the fatherless and the widow. The sick lie untended. The blind know not how to see, nor the deaf to hear, and they are left by the roadside to die. In India it is a sin to teach the blind and

the deaf because their affliction is regarded as a punishment for offences in a previous state of existence. If I had been born in the midst of these fatalistic doctrines, I should still be in darkness, my life a desert-land where no caravan of thought might pass between my spirit and the world beyond.

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement; nothing can be done without hope. When our forefathers laid the foundation of the American commonwealth, what nerved them to their task but a vision of a free community? Against the cold, inhospitable sky, across the wilderness white with snow, where lurked the hidden savage, gleamed the bow of promise, toward which they set their faces with the faith that levels mountains, fills up valleys, bridges, rivers, and carries civilization to the uttermost parts of the earth. Although the pioneers could not build according to the Hebraic ideal they

saw, yet they gave the pattern of all that is most enduring in our country today. They brought to the wilderness the thinking mind, the printed book, the deep-rooted desire for self-government and the English common law that judges alike the king and the subject, the law on which rests the whole structure of our society.

It is significant that the foundation of that law is optimistic. In Latin countries the court proceeds with a pessimistic bias. The prisoner is held guilty until he is proved innocent. In England and the United States there is an optimistic presumption that the accused is innocent until it is no longer possible to deny his guilt. Under our system, it is said, many criminals are acquitted; but it is surely better so, than that many innocent persons should suffer. The pessimist cries, "There is no enduring good in man! The tendency of all things is through perpetual loss

to chaos in the end. If there was ever an idea of good in things evil, it was impotent, and the world rushes on to ruin." But behold, the law of the two most sober-minded, practical and law-abiding nations on earth assumes the good in man and demands a proof of the bad.

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. The prophets of the world have been of good heart, or their standards would have stood naked in the field without a defender. Tolstoi's strictures on America lose power because they are pessimistic. If he had seen clearly the faults of America, and still believed in her capacity to overcome them, our people might have felt the stimulation of his censure. But the world turns its back on a hopeless prophet and listens to Emerson who takes into account the best qualities of the nation and attacks only the vices which no one can defend or deny. It

listens to the strong man, Lincoln, who in times of doubt, trouble and need does not falter. He sees success afar, and by strenuous hope, by hoping against hope, inspires a nation. Through the night of despair he says, "All is well," and thousands rest in his confidence. When such a man censures, and points to a fault, the nation obeys, and his words sink into the ears of men; but to the lamentations of the habitual Jeremiah the ears grow dull.

Our newspapers should remember this. The press is the pulpit of the modern world, and on the preachers who fill it much depends. If the protest of the press against unrighteous measures is to avail, then for ninety-nine days the word of the preacher should be buoyant and of good cheer, so that on the hundredth day the voice of censure may be a hundred times strong. This was Lincoln's way. He knew the people; he believed in them

and rested his faith on the justice and wisdom of the great majority. When in his rough and ready way he said, "You can't fool all the people all the time," he expressed a great principle, the doctrine of faith in human nature.

The prophet is not without honor, save he be a pessimist. The ecstatic prophecies of Isaiah did far more to restore the exiles of Israel to their homes than the lamentations of Jeremiah did to deliver them from the hands of evil-doers.

Even on Christmas Day do men remember that Christ came as a prophet of good? His joyous optimism is like water to feverish lips, and has for its highest expression the eight beatitudes. It is because Christ is an optimist that for ages he has dominated the Western world. For nineteen centuries Christendom has gazed into his shining face and felt that all things work together for good. St. Paul, too, taught the

faith which looks beyond the hardest things into the infinite horizon of heaven, where all limitations are lost in the light of perfect understanding. If you are born blind, search the treasures of darkness. They are more precious than the gold of Ophir. They are love and goodness and truth and hope, and their price is above rubies and sapphires.

// Jesus utters and Paul proclaims a message of peace and a message of reason, a belief in the Idea, not in things, in love, not conquest. The optimist is he who sees that men's actions are directed not by squadrons and armies, but by moral power, that the conquests of Alexander and Napoleon are less abiding than Newton's and Galileo's and St. Augustine's silent mastery of the world. Ideas are mightier than fire and sword. Noiselessly they propagate themselves from land to land, and mankind goes out and

reaps the rich harvest and thanks God; but the achievements of the warrior are like his canvas city, "to-day a camp, to-morrow all struck and vanished, a few pit-holes and heaps of straw." This was the gospel of Jesus two thousand years ago. Christmas Day is the festival of optimism.

As I stand in the sunshine of a sincere and earnest optimism, my imagination "paints yet more glorious triumphs on the cloud-curtain of the future." Out of the fierce struggle and turmoil of contending systems and powers I see a brighter spiritual era slowly emerge—an era in which there shall be no England, no France, no Germany, no America, no this people or that, but one family, the human race; one law, peace; one need, harmony; one means, labor; one taskmaster, God.

If I should try to say anew the creed of the optimist, I should say something

like this: "I believe in God, I believe in man, I believe in the power of the spirit. I believe it is a sacred duty to encourage ourselves and others; to hold the tongue from any unhappy word against God's world, because no man has any right to complain of a universe which God made good, and which thousands of men have striven to keep good. I believe we should so act that we may draw nearer and more near the age when no man shall live at his ease while another suffers." These are the articles of my faith, and there is yet another on which all depends—to bear this faith above every tempest which overfloods it, and to make it a principle in disaster and through affliction. Optimism is the harmony between man's spirit and the spirit of God pronouncing His works good.

THE END

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